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THE CAUSES OF WAR

A speech delivered by

THE HONORABLE ELIHU ROOT

At a Dinner given to him by the New York Peace
Society in recognition of his services
to international peace



THE PEACE SOCIETY
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

507 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK

ADDRESS BY THE HONORABLE ELIHU ROOT

It seems to me that the Peace Society in asking me to dine with them has gathered here all the evidences, all the proofs, has made the demonstration, of what it is worth to preserve peace; the faces of the dear old friends of a life-time, the children of many a friend who has passed away during my absence from New York, all this that I see about me, is what makes it worth while that peace shall be preserved—the charm and grace of life, the joy of living, the virtues, the beauty, the nobility, preserved, defended and continued by this modern civilization which substitutes peace for war. We have passed in the development of modern society far from those old days when men fought for the mere joy of fighting. Except here and there an individual and here and there a half-savage community, no one now makes war for the love of war.

So long as selfishness and greed and the willingness and the brutality to do injustice continue in this world, we must have the *policeman*; and the international policeman whose presence makes the use of his club unnecessary, is the army and the navy.

But the work of peace-loving men and women, the work of all those who love home, who desire that mankind shall be enlarged in intelligence and in moral vision, of all those who desire to see science and art and the graces of life and sweet charity and the love of mankind for one another continue and grow among men, their work is to aid, not by great demonstration, but by that quiet, that resistless influence, which

among great bodies of men makes up the tendency of mankind, and in the long process of the years moves men from savagery and brutality to peace and brotherhood. It rests with the army and the navy to make aggression and injustice unprofitable and unattractive. It rests with you and with me to exercise the powers that God has already placed in our hands. It rests with every man in the exercise of his duties, political and social, to move the conceptions of an honorable life away from the old ideas of savagery towards the new ideas of civilization of humanity, that in their progress gradually approach the supreme idea of Christianity.

Peace can never be except as it is founded upon justice. And it rests with us in our own country to see to it that the idea of justice prevails, and prevails against the declamation of the demagog, against the interested exhortation of the politician, against the hot temper of the thoughtless and of the inconsiderate. If we would have peace, it is not enough to cry "Peace! Peace!" It is essential that we should promote and insist upon the willingness of our country to do justice to all countries of the earth. In the exercise of those duties in which the ambassadors of Great Britain, of Brazil and of Japan have played so great a part with us in the last few years in Washington, the great obstacles to the doing of things which make for peace have been not the wish of the diplomatist, not the policy of the Government, but the inconsiderate and thoughtless unwillingness of the great body of the people of the respective countries to stand behind the man who

was willing for the sake of peace and justice, to make fair concessions.

There is a peculiar situation created when a diplomatic question arises between two countries. It is the duty of the diplomatic representatives to argue each the cause of his own country; he cannot turn his back upon an opponent in that friendly contest and state to his countrymen the weakness of his own position and the strength of the other side's position, and it is one of the great difficulties of peace-making and peace-keeping that the orators, the politicians, the stump speakers, aye, often the clergymen of each country, press and insist upon the extreme view of their own country, and impress upon the minds of the great masses of people who have not studied the question, the idea that all right is upon one side and all wrong upon the other side.

If you would help to make and keep peace, stand behind the men who are in the responsible positions of government, ready to recognize the fact that there is some right on the other side.

War comes to-day as the result of one of three causes: either actual or threatened wrong by one country to another, or suspicion by one country that another intends to do it wrong, and upon that suspicion, instinct leads the country that suspects the attack, to attack first; or, from bitterness of feeling, dependent in no degree whatever upon substantial questions of difference; and that bitterness of feeling leads to suspicion, and suspicion in the minds of those who suspect and who

entertain the bitter feeling, is justification for war. It is their justification to themselves. The least of these three causes of war is actual injustice. There are to-day acts of injustice being perpetrated by one country upon another, there are several situations in the world to-day, where gross injustice is being done. I will not mention them, because it would do more harm than it would good, but they are few in number. By far the greatest cause of war is that suspicion of injustice, threatened and intended, which comes from exasperated feeling. Now, feeling, the feeling which makes one nation willing to go to war with another, makes real causes of difference of no consequence. If the people of two countries want to fight, they will find an excuse—a pretext—find what seems to them sufficient cause, in anything. Questions which can be disposed of without the slightest difficulty between countries really friendly, are insoluble between countries really unfriendly. And the feeling between the peoples of different countries is the product of the acts and the words of the peoples of the countries themselves, not of their governments. Insult, contemptuous treatment, bad manners, arrogant and provincial assertion of superiority are the chief causes of war to-day.

And in this country of ours, we are not free from being guilty of all those great causes of war. The gentlemen who introduced into the Legislatures of California, Montana and Nevada, the legislation regarding the treatment of the Japanese in those states, doubtless had no conception of the fact that they were

offering to that great nation of gentlemen, of soldiers, of scholars and scientists, of statesmen, a nation worthy of challenging and receiving the respect, the honor and the homage of mankind, an insult that would bring on private war in any private relation in our own country. Thank Heaven, the wiser heads and the sounder hearts, instructed and enlightened upon the true nature of the proceedings, prevailed and overcame the inconsiderate and thoughtless.

There are no two men in this room to-night who can not bring on private war between themselves by an insult without any cause or reason, and it is so with the nations, for national pride, national sensitiveness, sense of national honor, are more keenly alive to insult than can be the case with any individual. But a few days ago, a member of the House of Representatives, charged upon the Chief Magistrate of the little Republic of Panama, a fraudulent conspiracy with regard to a contract under negotiation by the government of that country regarding the forests of Panama. All Panama was instantly alive with just indignation. This insult was felt all the more keenly because we, with our ninety millions and our great navy and army, presented an overwhelming and irresistible force toward a little Republic whose sovereignty we are bound, trebly bound, in honor to maintain and respect.

These are the things that make for war and if you would make for peace, you will frown upon them, condemn them, ostracize and punish by all social penalties, the men who are guilty of them, until it is understood and felt that an insult to a friendly foreign

power is a disgrace to the insulter, upon a level with the crimes that we denounce and for which the law inflicts disgraceful punishment.

Two-thirds of the suspicion, the dislike, the distrust with which our country was regarded by the people of South America, was the result of the arrogant and contemptuous bearing of Americans, of people of the United States, for those gentle, polite, sensitive, imaginative, delightful people. Allusion has been made to my visit there, to the generous, magnanimous hospitality that they have inherited from their ancestors of Spain and Portugal, and that opened wide the gateways of their land and their hearts to a message of courtesy and kindly consideration. No questions existed before to be settled, no serious questions have been settled, but the difference between the feeling, the attitude, of the people of Latin America and our Republic to-day from what it was four years ago, is the result of the conspicuous substitution of the treatment that one gentleman owes to another, for the treatment that one blackguard pays to another.

Now this is a subject for you to deal with. The government cannot reach it. Laws cannot control it; public opinion, public sentiment must deal with it, and when public opinion has risen to such height all over the world, that the peoples of every country treat the peoples of every other country with the human kindness that binds home communities together, you will see an end of war—and not until then.

But it becomes less and less necessary to preach peace. We have not reached ideal perfection yet, far

from it; but the way to judge of conditions in this world is not by comparing them with the standard of ideal perfection; it is by comparing the conditions to-day with the conditions of the past and noting, not what we can do to-day. If we note that alone, we must be discouraged; if we note that alone, we must be convinced of the desperate selfishness, the injustice, the cruelty of mankind. But if we compare the conditions of to-day with the conditions of yesterday and the last decade and the last generation, and the last century and centuries before, no one can fail to see that in all those qualities of the human heart which make the difference between cruel and brutal war, and kindly peace, the civilized world is steadily and surely advancing day by day. No one can fail to see that the continuous and unswerving tendency of human development is towards peace and the love of mankind.

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